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Bruce Springsteen, the rock 'n' roll star from Freehold, N.J.

Bruce Springsteen show goes off like clockwork

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ for The Gazette

The power of hype was the overriding message of Bruce Springsteen's concert Friday night at Theatre Maisonneuve.

I have never seen a show where the hype was so bludgeoned into the heads of the audience. Springsteen, of course, is the unfortunately obscure singer-songwriter who everyone has decided is the next big star — ever since they saw him on the covers of Newsweek, Rolling Stone, et al.

Hype is the business of building up expectations, and Springsteen's talent is that he effectively gears his act to fulfill those trumped-up expectations.

PRECIOUS

He has precious little to say, yet he was able to address himself to his "image", which his newfound — or new-hyped — fans have evidently confused for something that means more. The way so many of them could hardly wait for his songs to end in order to express their wild approval, is a measure of how the hype has affected their consciousness.

Springsteen is a poseur — no more no less — and each element in his music and stage act is designed to "get to" his audience.

His songs are bits of manufactured atmosphere, mainly about running away to the backstreets and sleazing it up with forbidden fruit — the kind of stuff they teach in high school "creative poetry" classes.

NUANCE

He either shouts or whispers his words, without bothering for nuance. His husky voice does not have much range — so it is piped through amplifiers in a boosted and echoed state to sound just like the record (Born To Run).

His band cranks out frenzy and bombast with the kind of anonymous functionality of Alice Cooper's group.

Bix Marcel Marceau striped jersey and his Chaplinesque baggy pants highlighted his two basic stage moves: wiggly legs and some stumbling about like a bum off the Bowery. People who don't know any better relish his "theatre."

The hype had even taken the precaution of playing in smaller concert-type halls (instead of rock arenas) to give the impression of "intimacy" — so that word of mouth will prod the fans who don't get to see his mythical act can rush out and buy his records (which is, after all, where the big bucks are).

FITTING

And what could be more fitting than the disc jockeys of CHOM-FM — the airwave patrons of this event — hyping its audience for two months in advance ("Once again Montreal will prove what a great audience it is ..."), so that the crowd begged and pleaded for several encores, which of course Springsteen had planned to find it in himself to accord.

Bejart ballet

Dancers' devotion pays dividends

By LINDE HOWE-BECK of The Gazette

Maurice Bejart's 20th Century Ballet burst on Montreal last night a day earlier than first expected and half an hour later than planned.

The Brussels-based ballet company was originally booked in Theatre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, for tonight and tomorrow night. But tickets sold out quickly and last week the company agreed to give a Sunday night performance including two additional ballets.

Their opening with Farah, a remarkable dance bearing the Bejart stamp, was performed against a cacophony of traditional Iranian music — and little more than an hour after the dancers arrived at the theatre.

TIRED

The curtain rose a half-hour late — but likely not late enough to suit the tired dancers whose afternoon flight from Detroit had been cancelled. They arrived here after hopping from Detroit, Buffalo and Toronto.

But their dancing didn't betray their fatigue. Bejart, to whom dance is an art of love, has obviously taught his dancers that love must transcend all.

His choreography is demanding; he dots his work with contortions so difficult his dancers must feel tortured but look fluid. He sends them flying across the stage. His movements are simultaneously crisp, clean and flowing.

TWELVE

Farah, a dance for 12 couples on a series of 12 variations on the number 12, signifies joy and fulfillment. Dancers in unisex white perform exacting exercises in a sort of madrigal sequence in keeping with the repetitious oriental background of Muslim chants and interludes provided by recorded flute, sitar and drums.

Every detail is important to Bejart — from the line of leg, arm, wrist and foot to the interplay of dancing shadows cast on the stage.

Moods switch in a flash from tenderness to truculence through posturings as opposite as classical proprieties and modern splits. Farah leans heavily on oriental attitudes and finally dissolves in a whirl of capes not unlike dervishes.

The second of the three ballets performed last night, Serait-ce la mort? (Could This Be Death?) was choreographed in 1970 to the music of Richard Strauss.

This is a more classical dance, yet it bears the inimitable Bejart signature.

Gerard Wilk, typical of the strong male dancer prevalent in the company, and four female dancers, held the theatre in a numbing, powerful grasp for long minutes. Their tension-filled dance spoke of tenderness in love and rejection. It drew wild applause from a drained audience.

But there were even more bravos to come for Bejart's brilliant L'Oiseau de feu (Firebird) choreographed in 1970 to music by Igor Stravinsky. This ballet has become a Bejart classic and last night, Ivan Marko in the role of the phoenix reborn from the ashes emphasized in part just why it is such a powerful piece.

He did fly across the stage. It was as simple as that. He ceased to be a man, a dancer, and became a bird.

Firebird is the only ballet to be performed again tonight and tomorrow.

In all, the quality of dancing Bejart has brought here is much higher than normally seen in Montreal. So with this in mind, those lucky enough to have tickets for further performances can look forward to intoxicating ballet.

Fair kids' theatre from 'Chou Clac'

By CARMEL DUMAS for The Gazette

Christmas is the height of the season for children's theatre: the clowns, the fairies, the magicians and all those other fantasy characters are competing with Santa Claus for a child's scream of excitement.

It's a sort of music hall of all these elements that the City of Montreal's trailer group, Chou Clac, is presenting at the Theatre Quat'Sous in the original play, Tilaco Bingo.

FOLLOW

Tilaco Bingo is a confused story about a group of people who follow an old tramp to an island, Tilaco. There lives a queen with the power of spreading hingemania, a terrible disease that brings on a compulsive urge to play bingo.

Interesting as the story may sound, however, it just doesn't grasp children's interest. There are too many characters grinning, throwing knowing glances or whispering "shsh" for no apparent reason.

Those methods only work when the children feel involved in the plot. In this case, nobody knew what the nine characters were really all about, and only the queen — clearly the evil one — caught the audience's fancy.

It may well have been that the audience was too old for a play that seemed to best amuse those between two and five years of age. A 10-year-old girl was disappointed that the characters didn't speak; all the sound track had been pre-recorded, and the small theatre gave away all the tricks.

CHARMS

But Tilaco-Bingo had other charms. The succession of dances, of colorful costumes and of decors kept the eye entertained, and all the young ones watched carefully to see what would be next.

The Chou Clacs obviously have a back-log of sketches they put together for the occasion, and are quite good at mime, song and dance.

But is that enough? Do children feel satisfied by a succession of weird activities that make no sense, such as a jump from miming a rocking boat to miming mechanical dolls? Do they feel satisfied by costumes or do they need to feel the character?

Those who attended the play Saturday missed a real story, even if were delighted by each opportunity to participate in the act. The conclusion may be that when the importance of children's theatre is more recognized, there will be an effort made to direct a play at an audience of a determined age. There won't be the need to toss it all in at once.

Still, Tilaco Bingo is entertainment for Christmas, and Santa closes the show with a distribution of balloons.

At the Quat'sous Dec. 20-28 and Jan. 3-4.

Movie star Alexis Smith

She brings Hollywood to NDG

By DANE LANKEN of The Gazette

The big white building at the south end of Decarie Blvd. never looked more "Hollywood" than it did this week.

Inside the building is a giant, barn-like studio, and in that studio, movie craftsmen had built a make-believe house — a set worthy of anything created by the old Dream Factories.

There was a living room, a dining room, kitchen, hall, front door, balcony, even a lawn and trees. Had there been a ceiling overhead instead of rows of klieg lights, you would have been at home.

The Hollywood look was enhanced by the people running around. Technicians with wires, booms and microphones, make-up artists with vials and hairbrushes, script girls with clip boards, even actors with scripts.

Among those was the most "Hollywood" of the bunch, the star of a dozen dramas and romances in the '40s, a name through the '50s and '60s, and a star again in the '70s — this time on the Broadway stage.

It was, of course, Alexis Smith.

She looked good. Matured — then again Night and Day was made 30 years ago. But still, tall, statuesque, blond and handsome. A friendly manner and a quick, warm smile.

BORN CANADIAN

"This is my first Canadian movie," she said, "but did you know I was born in Canada? In Penticton, B.C. I still have relatives out there and cousins in Toronto.

"I think it's wonderful that you're making movies here now. You know, I was just in Iran, at the film festival. There were films from 52 nations.

"It's such a healthy thing. Foreign films became competition for Hollywood, and did a great deal to make it more adventuresome and more creative."

Smith said she wasn't suggesting that there wasn't a lot of creativity behind those 1940s movies.

Alexis Smith . . . back in Canada

"What is different today," she said, "is that film-making is much more in the hands of the creative people. Young people are interested — anyone with a few bucks and a camera can make a movie. There are chances for independent producers that there never were before."

The movie that Alexis Smith is making here is called The Little Girl Who Lives Down The Lane. It's a thriller, about a 13-year-old girl Jody Foster, who poisons people — including the character Smith is playing. It's from a novel by Laird Koenig, and also stars Martin Sheen and Scott Jacoby.

The director is Nicola Gessner, a Frenchman, and the producers are three: Carlo Ponti, who is Italian but works out of France, Zev Brown, who is American, and Harold Greenberg, who was born and raised a Montrealer and who has been working long and hard to make Canada a movie capital.

"We're making pictures with universal appeal," Greenberg had explained earlier. "I've always talked about Canada being a major production centre. Now we're doing something about it."

Greenberg has another project called Breaking Point, with Robert Culp and John Colicos starring, underway in Toronto, besides The Little Girl here.

"It's nice to be back on the set," Smith said. "You know, attitudes about movies change, but making them doesn't. There's still a set and still a camera. That hasn't changed."

Smith's renaissance in the movies owes a lot to the enormous success she had doing Follies on Broadway. That Stephen Sondheim musical opened in mid-1971 and ran for 1½ years.

"It couldn't have worked better," Smith said. "I'd done a lot of stock but that was my first time on Broadway and the play was a hit and I won a Tony as best actress in a musical.

"It was wonderful!"

Rod leaves the Faces

LONDON — (AP) — Rod Stewart, one of Britain's top rock stars, has announced he has left the rock group The Faces and will form a new group next year.

Stewart said through a spokesman that he could no longer work as lead vocalist with The Faces — and had ended his four-year association with the group.

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